

Tennessee Pollution Prevention Partnership Success Story



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Pill Bottle Recycling Eliminates Tons Of Waste

The Member

James H. Quillen VA Medical Center is a tertiary care facility providing a full range of patient care services, with state-of-the-art technology as well as education and research. Comprehensive health care is provided through primary care, tertiary care, and long-term care in areas of medicine, surgery, psychiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, oncology, dentistry, geriatrics, and extended care. In addition to providing acute care, the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center offers geriatric and rehabilitation services through its 120-bed Nursing Home Care Unit. The facility also operates a 348-bed Domiciliary that offers a variety of treatment options, which includes a Homeless inpatient treatment program and Homeless Outreach. James H. Quillen VA Medical Center has an active affiliation with the James H. Quillen College of Medicine at East Tennessee State University. The medical school is housed on the grounds of the VA Medical Center and is utilizing the property through Enhanced-Use Leasing agreement. Over 300 University residents, interns, and students are trained at the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center each year. There are also nursing student affiliations with East Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee, Vanderbilt University and five other nursing schools. There are other major university affiliations with our medical center involving dentistry, pharmacy, social work, and psychology. A U.S. National Cemetery is also located on the grounds of the VA.

The Story

In less than a year after the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center began implementing its Green Environmental Management System (GEMS Program), the associates at the station began

stepping forward with ideas for improving the station practices to enhance overall environmental effectiveness. One of the main proponents for the cause is a pharmacy technician who has successfully incorporated a number of her ideas. Her group is now sharing a new source of revenue for their departmental needs that has been created through environmental projects with a positive payback. During the fourth quarter of 2005, the pharmacy technician suggested the idea of recycling the plastic pill bottles and actively assisted the facilities management team in developing and implementing the concept.

The Success

The James H. Quillen VA Medical Center initially conducted a trial recycling event in the pharmacy for plastic pill bottles and has now fully implemented the project. Far exceeding their initial estimate for this project from a one-week trial study conducted last fall by the station environmental management team, the actual implementation demonstrates that 5000 to 6000 lbs of plastic per year is being diverted from the landfill. This is based off an average generation of four 63-gallon containers (28 lbs each of plastic) per week during the first ten weeks into the recycling project.

The Pollution Prevented

Now with the project fully implemented with the pharmacy and momentum gained, the “plastic pill bottle” recycling program is consistently generating four 63-gallon containers (28 lbs each of plastic) per week. At this rate, almost three tons of solid waste is eliminated from the landfill annually.

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